

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-11 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 L-03 NSC-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00

INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SAB-01 SAM-01 OMB-01

SCCT-01 AF-06 SS-15 /083 W
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O R 161538Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8175

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, UQ, XF

SUBJ: FINANCIAL TIMES ARTICLE ON USG-PLO CONTACTS

1. FINANCIAL TIMES OF JAN 16 PROMINENTLY FRONT-PAGES ARTICLE FROM WASHINGTON BY DAVID BELL HEADLINED "WASHINGTON IN SECRET CONTACT WITH PLO LEADERS". ARTICLE OPENS: "AN INDIRECT AND SECRET EXPLORATORY DIALOGUE OVER THE ROLE OF PALESTINIANS IN MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS HAS BEEN TAKING PLACE DURING RECENT MONTHS BETWEEN AMERICAN OFFICIALS AND LEADERS OF THE PALESTINIAN LIBERATION ORGANIZATION. PUBLICLY THE US CONTINUES TO BLOCK ANY RESOLUTION IN THE UN WHICH WOULD GIVE THE PALESTINIANS FORMAL RECOGNITION AND THERE IS NO EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT DURING THE SECRET EXCHANGES THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAS YET OFFERED ANY SUBSTANTIVE CONCESSIONS FROM THIS POSITION.

"THE IMMEDIATE PURPOSE OF THIS CLANDESTINE DIPLOMACY APPEARS TO BE TO DRAW THE PLO INTO DIRECT DISCUSSIONS WITH
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THE US ON THE PALESTINIANS' NEGOTIATING POSITION.

"IT SEEMS INCONCEIVABLE THAT THE US WOULD RECOGNIZE THE PLO WITHOUT PARALLEL GUARANTEES THAT THE PLO WOULD RECOGNISE ISRAEL.

"SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS INSISTED TODAY THAT THE US HAS NEVER AUTHORISED ANYONE TO ACT, FORMALLY OR INFORMALLY, AS AN EMISSARY ON ITS BEHALF.

"BUT THEY ADMIT THAT STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS HAVE HAD DISCUSSIONS WITH A NUMBER OF PEOPLE CLAIMING TO CARRY MESSAGES FROM THE PLO.

"ACCORDING TO INFORMED SOURCES IN THE US, EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST, THE CONTACTS BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES HAVE SO FAR BEEN ENTIRELY THROUGH THIRD PARTIES, INCLUDING A JEWISH UT NON-ZIONIST, AMERICAN COLLEGE PROFESSOR WITH EXTENSIVE CONTACTS ON BOTH SIDES.

.THEY ARE UNDERSTOOD TO HAVE BEGUN LAST AUGUST AND TO HAVE INCLUDED AT LEAST ONE EXCHANGE OF MESSAGE BETWEEN MR. YASSIR ARAFAT, THE PLO LEADER' AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT.

"AFTER THESE EXCHANGES, THE PLO, WHICH WAS INITIALLY WARY OF THEM, IS NOW AWAITING CLARIFICATION OF THE US ATTITUDE TO THE ORGANISATION.

"REPORTS OF CONTACT BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES COINCIDE WITH A SUBTLE BUT VERY DEFINITE CHANGE IN THE AMERICAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE PALESTINIANS.,

2. AFTER QUOTING BRIEFLY FROM SAUNDERS TESTIMONY LAST NOVEMBER, ARTICLE CONTINUES:

"THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OF THE EXCHANGES BEGAN LAST AUGUST WHEN THE AMERICAN PROFESSOR FROM CONNECTICUT ARRIVED IN BEIRUT WITH A PLAN -- OF HIS OWN CREATION -- THAT THE PLO AND ISRAEL SHOULD BOTH AGREE TO RECOGNISE EACH OTHER AS A WAY AT LEAST TO BEGIN TO BREAK DEADLOCK IN MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS.'

3. ARTICLE STATES ARAFAT AND SENIOR PLO OFFICIALS, WHILE CAUTIOUS, RECOGNIZED "SOONER OR LATER PALESTINIANS FACED

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A MAJOR DECISION ABOUT HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE REALITY OF ISRAEL", AND IN OTHER INTERVIEWS SENIOR PALESTINIANS BEGAN TO TALK ABOUT ENDING "STATE OF WAR" IF ISRAEL RETURNED TO 1948 BOUNDARIES, MARKING "MAJOR CHANGE IN PALESTINIAN ATTITUDES".

4. ARTICLE CONTINUES:

'AFTER TALKS IN BEIRUT, THE AMERICAN PROFESSOR RETURNED TO THE US AND REPORTED TO SENIOR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS. HE THEN WENT BACK TO BEIRUT WITH AN INDICATION FROM THEM THAT THEY MIGHT BE PREPARED TO MEET MR. ARAFAT SECRETLY FURTHER TO DISCUSS THE PLO'S POINT OF VIEW." THEN FOLLOWED MESSAGES DURING WHICH ARAFAT OFFERED TO MEET DR. KISSINGER BUT REFUSED TO MEET SENIOR US OFFICIALS PRIVATELY. 'AMERICANS TURNED THIS DOWN... HOWEVER' IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS THE SAME AMERICAN PROFESSOR HAS AGAIN BEEN UNCLASSIFIED

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IN MIDDLE EAST AND EUROPE" AND IS BELIEVED TO HAVE RETURNED WITH MESSAGE FROM PLO WANTING MORE "PROOF OF AMERICAN GOOD FAITH", POSSIBLY IN STATEMENT BY SECSTATE. ARTICLE NOTES DEPARTMENT LIKELY TO PROCEED CAUTIOUSLY LEST IT ANGER ISRAELIS BUT 'IS PLEASED THE EXCHANGES ARE TAKING PLACE" ALTHOUGH NEITHER PALESTINIANS NOR US WANT TO GET INVOLVED OPENLY IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE OTHER.

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